

As wel to shewen his heighe magnificence,
As to doon any kyng a reverence.

Greet cheere dooth this noble senatour
To kyng Alla, and he to hym also;
Everich of hem dooth oother greet honour;
And so bifel, that in a day or two,
This senatour is to kyng Alla go
To feste, and shortly, if I shal nat lye,
Custances sone wente in his compaignye.

Som men wolde seyn, at requeste of Custance,
This senatour hath lad this child to feeste;
I may nat tellen every circumstance,
Be as he may, ther was he at the leeste;
But sooth is this, that at his moodres beeste,
Biform Alla, duryng the metes space,
The child stood, lookyng in the kynges face.

This Alla kyng hath of this child greet wonder,
And to the senatour he seyde anon,
Whos is that faire child that stondeth yonder?
I noot, quod he, by God and by Seint John!
A mooder he hath, but fader hath he noon
That I of woot, but shortly, in a stounde
He tolde Alla how that this child was founde.

But God woot, quod this senatour also,
So vertuous a lyvere in my lyf
Ne saugh I nevere as she, ne herd of mo
Of worldly women, mayde ne of wyf;
I dar wel seyn hir hadde levere a knyf
Thurghout hir brest, than ben a womman wikke;
There is no man koude bryng hire to that prikke.

NOW was this child as lyke unto Custance
As possible is a creature to be.
This Alla hath the face in remembrance
Of dame Custance, and theron mused he,
If that the chilles mooder were aught she
That is his wyf, and pryvely he sighte,
And spedde hym fro the table that he myghte.

Parfay! thoghte he, fantome is in myn heed!
Ioghte deme of skilful juggement,
That in the salte see my wyf is deed;
And afterward he made his argument,
What woot I, if that Crist have hyder ysent
My wyf by see, as wel as he hire sente
To my contree fro thennes that she wente?

And after noon, hoom with the senatour
Goth Alla, for to seen this wonder chaunce.
This senatour dooth Alla greet honour,
And hastily he sente after Custaunce;
But trusteth weel, hire liste nat to daunce,
Whan that she wiste wherfore was that sonde;
Unnethe upon hir feet she myghte stonde.

WHAN Alla saugh his wyf, faire he hire
grette,
And weep, that it was routhe for to see;
for at the firste look he on hire sette,

He knew wel verrailly that it was she;
And she for sorwe as dounb stant as a tree;
So was hir herte shet in hir distresse
Whan she remembered his unkyndenesse.

Twyes she swowned in his owene sighte,
He weep, and hym excuseth pitously;
Now God, quod he, and all his halwes brighte,
So wisly on my soul as have mercy,
That of youre harm as gilteles am I,
As is Maurice my sone, so lyk your face;
Elles the feend me fecche out of this place!

Long was the sobbyng and the bitter peyne,
Er that hir woful hertes myghte cesse;
Greet was the pitee for to heere hem pleyne,
Thurgh whiche pleintes gan hir wo encrease.
I pray yow all my labour to relesse,
I may nat telle hir wo until tomorwe,
I am so wery for to speke of sorwe.

But finally, whan that the sothe is wist,
That Alla gilteles was of hir wo,
I trowe an hundred tymes been they kist,
And swich a blisse is ther bitwix hem two,
That, save the joye that lasteth evermo,
Ther is noon lyk, that any creature
Hath seyn, or shal, whil that the world may dure.

Tho preyde she hir housbonde mekely,
In relief of hir longe pitous pyne,
That he wolde preyre hir fader specially,
That of his magestee he wolde enclyne
To vouchesauf som day with hym to dyne:
She preyde hym eek he wolde by no weye
Unto hir fader no word of hire seye.

Som men wold seyn how that the child Maurice
Dooth this message unto the emperour;
But, as I gesse, Alla was nat so nyce
To hym, that was of so sovereyn honour
As he that is of cristen folk the flour,
Sente any child, but it is bet to deeme
He wente hymself, and so it may well seeme.

This emperour hath graunted gentilly
To come to dyner, as he hym bisoughte;
And wel rede I, he looked bisily
Upon this child, and on his doghter thoghte.
Alla goth to his in, and, as him oghte,
Arrayed for this feste in every wise,
As ferforth as his konnyng may suffice.

The morwe cam, and Alla gan hym dresse,
And eek his wyf, this emperour to meete;
And forth they ryde in joye and in gladnesse;
And whan she saugh hir fader in the strete,
She lighte doun and falleth hym to feete:
Fader, quod she, youre yonge child, Custance
Is now ful clene out of youre remembrance.

I am youre doghter Custance, quod she,
That whilom ye han sent unto Surrye.

It am I, fader, that in the salte see
Was put allone, and dampned for to dye.
Now, goode fader, mercy, I yow crye!
Sende me namoore unto noon hethenesse,
But thonketh my lord heere of his kyndenesse.

Who kan the pitous joye tellen al
Bitwix hem thre, syn they been thus ymette?
But of my tale make an ende I shal;
The day goth faste, I wol no lenger lette.
This glade folk to dyner they hem sette;
In joye and blisse at mete I lete hem dwelle,
A thousand foold wel moore than I kan telle.

This child Maurice was sithen emperour
Maad by the pope and lyved cristenly.
To Cristes chirche he dide greet honour;
But I lete al his storie passen by;
Of Custance is my tale specially.
In the olde Romane geestes may men fynde
Maurices lyf; I bere it noght in mynde.

This kyng Alla, whan he his tyme say,
With his Custance, his hooly wyf so sweete,
To Engelond been they come the righte way,
Wheras they lyve in joye and in quiete;
But litel while it lasteth, I yow heete,
Joye of this world, for tyme wol nat abyde;
fro day to nyght it changeth as the tyde.

Who lyved evere in swich delit o day
That hym ne moeved outhur conscience,
O ire, or talent, or som kynne affray,
Envye, or pride, or passion, or offence?
I ne seye but for this ende this sentence,
That litel while in joye or in plesance
Lasteth the blisse of Alla with Custance;

for deeth, that taketh of heigh and logh his rente,
Whan passed was a yeer, evene as I gesse,
Out of this world this kyng Alla he hente,
for whom Custance hath ful greet hevynnesse.
Now lat us praye to God his soule blesse!
And dame Custance, finally to seye,
Toward the toun of Rome goth hir weye.

To Rome is come this hooly creature,
And fyndeth ther hire freendes boole and
sounde:

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE SHIPMANNES TALE.

A MERCHANT whilom
dwelled at Seint Denys,
That riche was, for which
men helde hym wys;
A wyf he hadde of ex-
cellent beautee,
And compaignable and
revelous was she,
Which is a thyng that
causeth more dispence

Now is she scaped al hire aventure;
And whan that she hir fader bath yfounde,
Doun on hir knees falleth she to grounde;
Wepyng for tendrenesse in herte blithe,
She heriyeth God an hundred thousand sithe.

In vertu and in hooly almus, dede
They lyven alle, and nevere asonder wende;
Til deeth departed hem this lyf they lede.
And fareth now weel, my tale is at an ende.
Now Jhesu Crist, that of his myght may
sende
Joye after wo, governe us in his grace,
And kepe us alle that been in this place!
Amen.

Heere endeth the Tale of the Man of Lawe.

Next folwith the Shipman his prologe.

QURE Hoste upon his stiropes
stode anon,
And seyde, Good men, herken-
eth, everichon;
This was a thrifty tale for the
nones!

Sir Parish Prest, quod he, for Goddes bones,
Telle us a tale, as was thy forward yore;
I se wel that ye lerned men in lore
Can moche good, by Goddes dignitee!

The Persone him answerde, Benedicite!
What eyleth the man, so sinfully to swere?
Oure Hoste answerde, O Jankyn, be ye there?
I smelle a Loller in the wind, quod he.

How! good men, quod our Hoste, herkneth me,
Abydeth, for Goddes digne passioun,
for we shal han a predicacioun;
This Loller here wol prechen us somewhat.
Nay, by my fader soule! that shal he nat!
Seyde the Shipman; here shal he nat preche;
He shal no gospel glosen here ne teche.
We leven alle in the grete God, quod he,
He wolde sowen som difficulte,
Or springen cokkel in our clene corn;
And therfore, Hoste, I warne the biforn,
My joly body shal a tale telle,
And I shal clynken yow so mery a belle,
That I shal waken al this compaignye;
But it shal nat ben of philosophye,
Ne phislyas, ne termes queynte of lawe;
There is but litel Latin in my mawe.

Here endith the Shipman his prologe.

Than worth is al the chiere and reverence
That men hem doon at festes & at daunces;
Swiche salutaciouns and contenaunces
Passen as dooth a shadwe upon the wal.
But wo is hym that payen moot for al;
The sely housbonde, algate he moste paye;
He moot us clothe, and he moot us arraye,
Al for his owene worship richely,
In which array we daunce jolily.
And if that he noght may, paraventure,